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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002041

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SUBJECT: CODEL SCHIFF MEETS PML-N INFO SECRETARY AHSAN IQBAL

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Codel Schiff -- U.S. Representatives Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) -- met May 27 with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Information Secretary and National Assemblyman Ahsan Iqbal. He argued that the U.S. had relied too heavily on President Pervez Musharraf, particularly to fight the war on terror. This is really "our war," Iqbal argued, but the Pakistani public did not perceive it that way. Iqbal insisted that the pre-November 3 judiciary would be restored. Though his party hoped to continue to stay in the government coalition, it had to withdraw from the federal cabinet when the 30-day deadline passed and would join thousands in the streets if the former judges were not put back on the bench, he warned. He ended by suggesting that the U.S. should deploy more "soft power" through parliamentary exchanges, social development projects, and American university satellite campuses; the USG had given too much military aid over the years. End summary.

Aiming for Musharraf

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¶2. (C) PML-N Information Secretary Ahsan Iqbal launched his May 27 meeting with Codel Schiff by stating that "the root cause of all Pakistan's problems is our many military dictatorships." Pointedly including President Pervez Musharraf, Iqbal recounted how each military leader was forced to target the country's mainstream political parties in order to legitimize their own rule and eliminate legitimate competition. However, this course of action inevitably creates space for marginal groups, such as religious parties, which would otherwise not win popular support, Iqbal argued.

¶3. (C) Iqbal criticized the U.S.'s acceptance of the "Musharraf myth," i.e., that without him religious parties would sweep to power. It was the opposite, Iqbal explained. By banning Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif from the 2002 parliamentary elections, the religious parties won more (not fewer) seats in the national and provincial assemblies. He further noted that PPP and PML-N party workers were arrested during the 2007 state of emergency not alleged terrorists or even religious party workers.

¶4. (C) Iqbal continued that Pakistanis' popular perception was that Musharraf had given into the USG's agenda in exchange for his staying in power. Consequently, the war on terror (GWOT) was not widely supported. And yet, Iqbal insisted, "this is our war." The PML-N hoped to convince the

Pakistani people to support the fight against extremism, Iqbal committed.

With the PPP

15. (C) The PML-N hoped its coalition with the PPP would survive, Iqbal commented, but its ministers, including himself, had to leave the federal cabinet when the pre-November 3 judges were not restored within the 30-day deadline. "This was our number one issue in the election campaign," Iqbal stated, arguing that Musharraf had imposed the current judiciary on the country. But PML-N's absence from the cabinet was a "temporary crisis," he assured the codel, adding that his party would continue to give "unconditional support to the PPP-led GOP.

16. (C) Iqbal revealed that the two coalition partners continued to negotiate on the modalities of restoring the judiciary. The bone of contention continued to be the future status of former Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. The PML-N, though, would not agree to any amendments package until the lawyers' movement and civil society groups concurred, Iqbal insisted. If not satisfied, he warned, a hundred thousand Chaudhry supporters could be mobilized. The protesters would be joined by the economically disadvantaged, Iqbal added.

17. (C) Returning to Musharraf, Iqbal advocated for his impeachment, though resignation seemed acceptable to the PML-N and "more honorable" for the President. Iqbal lamented

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that Musharraf was surrounded by a "cadre of bad advisors."

Exchanges

18. (C) Noting that this visit was under the aegis of the House Democracy Assistance Commission, Iqbal made a pitch for more legislature-to-legislature exchanges and support. He feared Pakistan's parliament lacked sufficient infrastructure to monitor the executive, particularly the country's military complex. More staff was needed, and they should be independent experts, said Iqbal, additionally advocating for parliament-sponsored think tanks.

19. (C) But instead of democracy assistance, Iqbal complained, USG financial aid had gone principally to the military, "not to the people." The public, therefore, historically associated the USG with the country's many military leaders. He said the USG should adopt a social sector "flagship project" to counteract this wide public perception.

110. (C) Pakistan needed more than aid; it also needed private investment. Furthermore, American universities should be encouraged to establish satellite campuses throughout Pakistan, and the U.S.'s immigration policies should be reviewed to ensure that Pakistani students who did go abroad for study went to the U.S., Iqbal suggested. More and more students, however, were studying in the UK, Australia and other European countries, to the U.S.'s detriment, Iqbal thought.

11. (U) Codel Schiff did not clear this cable.

PATTERSON